Communion Meditation
December 1, 1974
Jeremiah 33:14-16
I Thessalonians 5:1-6

In a book entitled The Moods of Christmas Howard Thurman observes that down through history single events or words became critical turning points for future generations without the people directly involved realizing it. Who, for instance, on the night of December 16, 1773, realized the future significance of a group of men, disguised as Indians, dumping some tea into Boston Harbor?

Or who could see the tremendous significance for the future spirit of the nation President Lincoln's words would have, when he scratched out a very modest speech for the dedication of a military cemetery at Gettysburg?

Thurman writes: "There must always be provision for the ample moment when an event takes on the character of the Sacramental, however such an event may be named in the calendar. The true significance of the event is to be found in the quality of celebration which it inspires in the heart." (p.31)

Consider for instance a most unlikely time - the Seventh century before Christ: and a most unlikely man - the reluctant and strange ~~man~~ prophet of God by the name of Jeremiah. King Zedekiah had ~~participated~~ been persuaded to participate in a foolish & ~~very~~ inadvisable ~~revolution~~ revolt against the overwhelming power of Babylon. Jeremiah, whose advice was ~~not requested~~ unsolicited and ~~not appreciated~~ unappreciated ~~when he offered it~~, had warned against the ~~foolish~~ dire consequences of the revolt. Now all was lost: the King and the entire ruling class of Judah had carried off into Babylonian exile: Jerusalem, including the Temple, was in ruins. Who at the time saw the significance of the words which Jeremiah wrote? "Behold the days are coming says the Lord, when I will fulfill the promise I made to Israel. I will cause a righteous branch to shoot forth".

No one, to be precise. What the people heard was that the nation would be restored to its former glory. Another great king would sit on the throne of David and the ~~Kings~~ rulers of Babylon and Egypt would know once again that you can't get away with pushing God's people around indefinitely. No one really heard. what Jeremiah said ....

And when the promise was fulfilled no one of much consequence seemed to notice with the exception of a few shepherds and several astronomers. The moment came and went.

Forty-five years later, a man who knew the significance of the birth in Bethlehem wrote a letter to a group of ~~people who were learning~~ his friends in the Xtian Church at Thessalonica: and this is what he said:

> "..the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night...so let us not sleep...let us keep awake..."

- Watch for the ample moment?

Now, we have trouble with those words because, unfortunately, people seem more ready to believe that God wants to end the world than that He loves it. ("The day of the Lord") has come to be synonymous with an ominous catyclsme. But, in fact, St. Paul was telling his friends something very important about life in the world - something very important for us on this day in particular: namely, that any moment can become a moment of grace, and that a person who goes through life with eyes tightly closed - asleep, as it were - is likely to miss the moment when it happens.

the idiom →

open eyes to grace

So, today, Advent: the season that reminds us to expect the unexpected: the season of the year that suggests that the holy comes to us in the ordinary: the season that reminds us that the holiest thing that ever happened in human history took place in the routine event of human birth.

today

Culturally, we begin in earnest something that began when the first Santa Claus appeared on the counter back in October. We will - all of us - get caught up in it. The chances are that in the next three weeks we will overwork - get over-tired - over anxious - and over irritable. We may even look forward to the blessed silence of December 26 - and in the meantime walk through the potentially beautiful and grace-filled days of Advent with our eyes tightly closed.

How God in his heaven must regret that! Because, I believe, for those who are awake and alert he graces this season with his love and peace and healing in a special way. Even as his love came down in a humble birth, so I believe in this season His love looks for ways to be let loose among us. It tugs at our hearts and somehow intensifies our love. God, I believe, is very ready to get into the act during Advent and work an incarnation - an enfleshing of His love in us - that is if we're not too busy or too tired or too irritable.

I believe there are moments of quiet grace given to us as gifts in this season. I believe the joy of God twinkles in the eyes of little children - if you will see it. I believe God's pleasure in His creation is reflected in grandparents who indulge the little ones a bit even if they would not or could not have done it with their own. I believe His love is revealed in the thoughtful gift, the kind word. And I believe His will for His world reaches into our lives as suddenly - at Christmas - we are made uncomfortable at the thought of war, hunger, injustice, suffering.

with the wisdom + grace of the years

when I believe God touches us when the thought of the everyday realities of hunger, injustice, suffering - become - at Christmas — intolerable...

So, today, the first Sunday in the season that reminds us to expect that which is always unexpected. And we begin - by design - at the place He promised to meet us - His table: eating and drinking together those ordinary elements - by which He choses to have His presence remembered.

~~Phillips Brooks said it best, in words we will hear and sing -~~

"How silently, how silently, the wondrous gift is given!
So God imparts to human hearts the blessings of His heaven.
No ear may hear His coming, But in this world of sin,
Where meek souls will receive Him, still the dear
Christ enters in." Amen.

Father, be with us in the days ahead. Keep us awake to your presence in our lives: and alert to the moments of grace which you give. Through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Amen.

The promise of Advent is that God comes into the world without fanfare: that his loving & healing presence is incarnate in the world in unusual & unlikely ways: that he gives moments of goodness & grace to those who are awake and alert

No one ever said that better than Phillips Brooks - in words we will hear & sing in this season . . .